

Nora Galvin

Bridgeport (Sen. Musto's district)

I am testifying on SB 414, An act concerning the Department of Public Health's recommendations concerning genealogists' access to vital records

I am opposed to this legislation

Mr./Ms. Chairman and members of the Committee

I am a professional genealogist. I own a business and I earn my living by doing research for other people. Access to Connecticut's large collection of vital records is critical to the success of my business.

Except for births that occurred less than 100 years ago, vital records are public records in Connecticut. It is the job of the registrars of vital statistics to make the records available to the public when the office is open for business. Otherwise they are not public records.

It mystifies me that the DPH wants to restrict access to records by genealogists. This legislation sets up an adversarial relationship where none exists.

Genealogists and registrars have important working relationships. Each does her best to accommodate the needs and rights of the other. Registrars often have other duties, especially in a town clerk's office. Genealogists understand the importance of these other duties and we do our best to fit our work into the workflow of the registrar.

There does not seem to be a problem with too much research traffic. In my eight-year career I have seen at most two other researchers in any registrar's office I have visited. There are many more people researching property titles than there are genealogists. My experience has shown me that genealogists are accommodating to the needs and rights of registrars and vice versa.

The wording of this proposed change is so vague as to be meaningless. Allowing closure of the records "at the registrar's discretion" could create a patchwork of hours and days of access that would become a nightmare for any Connecticut researcher. People plan vacations around genealogical research. Imagine flying to Connecticut from, say, California and being denied access to vital records. We already have two city registrars of VRs who have declared themselves exempt from this statute—New Haven and Bridgeport. Is this legislation an attempt to legitimize their restrictions?

In closing, I submit that the proposed legislation is vague, open ended, impossible to define, unnecessary and wrong-headed. It takes away the rights of the public and genealogists to public records. I ask you to keep Connecticut in the vanguard of open-vital-records states and vote no on this proposed change.